

Indigenous peoples' view in the current pandemic

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The population of indigenous peoples (IP) in South America comprises around 40 million people (FAO and Griffiths). This number demonstrates their cultural resilience and persistence despite the impacts of colonization that continue to affect their livelihood across the continent and beyond. The international community after many years of discussion had recognized indigenous peoples as a group and subject of law. International instruments were developed such as the International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 (ILO N°169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which recognize the collective rights of indigenous peoples, their self-determination in important issues, particularly those related to consultation, participation and rights over their territories and resources. These instruments represent political tools to manage difficulties such as the current sanitary crisis.

UNDRIP 2007

Article 24.1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

Article 31.2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.

(Lennox y Stephens, 2013)

The recognition mentioned above address fundamental aspects of indigenous peoples' lives such as the recognitions of their institutions, traditional law and customs necessary to maintain their holistic and integral view of development. The importance of these aspects is also mentioned in the Agenda 2030 where traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples is considered a valuable contribution to build sustainable development.

Indigenous peoples' communities continue to face a detrimental socio-economical condition. Moreover, in South America there are countries which have not recognized indigenous peoples and their rights in their constitutions. Currently, the pandemic and its negative implications aggravate even more the weak legal situation of indigenous peoples in terms of the full respect for their fundamental rights mentioned in the UNDRIP. For Mapuche communities in Chile-Argentina the situation is no different. Accurate data is necessary to develop policies which adequately address indigenous peoples' specific situation. However, there are extreme difficulties to report how critical the health situation of indigenous peoples is since the pandemic started because of the invisibility of indigenous peoples in national statistical data. Therefore, with national statistical data in countries which generally do not account for the specific situation of indigenous peoples (Lennox y Stephens, 2013), it is almost impossible to elaborate accurate reports at different levels (local, regional and international). This condition affects processes of elaboration, promotion, monitoring and re-shaping of policies to enhance, for instance, local indigenous innovations.

On the other hand, sanitary measures in pandemic times have introduced additional limitations which impede them to rebuild their economic systems. Meanwhile, socio-cultural activities are restricted, imposing serious difficulties to generate successful local strategies, as was possible in other crises in the past. Nonetheless, community members have been observing the deterioration

of their livelihood in a comprehensive way. Their understanding of this current situation can be described as follows: Mapuche people are facing high uncertainty to continue living in harmony with nature because their traditional medicine practices are connected to the nature resources which are deteriorating. Hence, access to the land, environmental conservation and biodiversity are important aspects to be considered. Currently, cultural practices are more and more difficult to carry out for many factors such as political pressure to incorporate Mapuche lands under the concept of business as usual and its implications on local culture.

Despite the above mentioned, communities are still using their own traditional medicine because from their point of view, it is much more effective than the system of modern medicine. Additionally, modern medicine responds to the current sanitary crisis with recommendations such as physical distance, good hygiene, and vaccines should be developed soon. Whereas at community level, there is an atmosphere of confusion, because information about the virus is totally missing.

For indigenous peoples, the concept of health has a holistic meaning. They consider themselves an integral part of nature, therefore, land resources and health are connected. In other words, a community and the ecosystem are not isolated (Lennox y Stephens, 2013). Therefore, the level of soil fertility in indigenous communities plays a crucial role in the nutritional and health condition of community members.

Since the pandemic outbreak, community members have been adopting physical distance but also, based on novel plants they have been using traditional medicine as well as spiritual aspect of traditional medicine. The imminent collapse of health systems because of the increasing number of infected people, may mean that indigenous peoples are left behind and will not get adequate attention in medical centers. This scenario has produced a decrease in indigenous peoples' confidence in modern medicine.

Based on history, in addition to military actions and their consequences, indigenous peoples suffered health crises during the colonization time in Chile too. Traditional medicine played a crucial role to overcome past sanitary crises related to diseases such as Typhus, Viruela, Tuberculosis and Cholera, among others (Errázuriz F, 2006; Laval, 2015). Consequently, past experiences of IP let traditional medicine as the only option that community members believe and understood properly. Since health concept for the Mapuche people is about harmony among the environment, community members and themselves (Errázuriz F, 2006).

Nevertheless, knowledge on traditional indigenous medicine is totally ignored as valid alternative to manage this pandemic from the local level, despite its recognition in international legal instruments (please see the box). In this scenario, members of Mapuche communities are totally convinced of the efficacy of their ancestral knowledge for staying healthy under this new pandemic threat. The cultivation and use of medicinal plants as well as agricultural practices are fundamental in this strategy. Cultural practices such as the promotion of “Huertas” (vegetables areas) enhance nutritional food production and solidarity among community members. But also, to support and respect traditional institutions and authorities, particularly the Machi (religious authorities) to

increase local resilience and making valid contributions to the current cultural development of Mapuche people is vital.

Current actions of Mapuche people in Patagonia-Argentina to safeguard their lands and resources and struggle for a good life: Mapuche -Tewelche reject mining operations in their territories. J. Antieco <https://twitter.com/mmindigenas/status/1342152163917770753>

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